



National
Communication
Association

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January 26, 2014

Texas State Board of Education
c/o Texas Education Agency
1701 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701

To the Members of the Texas State Board of Education:

On behalf of the nearly 8,000 members of the National Communication Association, I write today to urge the State Board of Education (SBOE) to maintain the statewide half-credit requirement in Speech/Communication for graduation from Texas high schools. A necessary and highly beneficial expectation for Texas students, the statewide Speech/Communication requirement serves the students and citizens of Texas well by imparting to the state's high school graduates a set of skills and a range of abilities essential for their success in higher education and in the workplace. Sacrificing this requirement to the vagaries of local control would erode an innovative and important dimension of Texas' secondary education system.

The National Communication Association (NCA) is the nation's largest scholarly society that advances the discipline of communication and the study of all forms, modes, media and consequences of communication at elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educational levels. NCA serves the scholars, teachers, and practitioners who are its members by enabling and supporting their professional interests in research and teaching. NCA is a member learned society of the American Council of Learned Societies, a governing member of the Consortium of Social Science Associations, and a member of the National Humanities Alliance.

As a statewide curricular requirement for the last twelve years, Texas' Speech/Communication course has educated millions of Texas students in important and valuable skills—verbal communication skills, nonverbal and listening skills, interpersonal and small group skills. These skills are all part of the TEKS for Communication Applications and Professional Communication and are in high demand in the contemporary high-skilled workplace of the 21st century. Survey after survey of employer expectations for quality employees demonstrates the centrality of communication skills for successful career advancement. One 2013 survey of hundreds of private sector employers from companies with over 25 employees reveals that 80% of respondents believe that educational institutions should place more emphasis than they do currently on the development of effective oral communication and effective written communication. That same study revealed that 93% of respondents believed that an employee's capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than specialized or technical study.

Speech and communication education at the secondary level for all Texas students is also critically important for the success of those students who pursue a degree in higher education. On several different levels, speech/communication education meaningfully prepares students for college success. Minimally, it allows them greater preparation for the communication requirements they will face as college students. My immediate predecessor as president of NCA, Professor Steven Beebe of Texas State University, has already testified before the SBOE about a survey of 70 Texas colleges and universities that found that 91% either require a communication course for graduation (75%) or make such courses available through a required election option (16%). Moreover, HB 5 mandates that secondary schools enhance college preparation through dual-credit opportunities, and Speech/Communication courses are offered through many of Texas' community college for dual-credit. Remanding this requirement to local school board control may occasion a drop in enrollment numbers for dual-credit programs.

A final argument for the maintenance of a statewide speech/communication requirement in Texas is a practical one—there is, quite simply, a strong likelihood that local school boards will drop this requirement unless it is statewide. Communication skills and knowledge of communication are global concerns; they do not vary in importance for different parts of Texas or for different students across the state. In the highly mobile, social mediated world of the 21st century, it's likely that a student growing up in Midland will need to take her learned communication skills with her to college in San Marcos, or to her first job in Austin, and to her second job in New York City. Sadly, local school boards are induced to streamline or eliminate requirements unless they are mandated by the state, and we fear that such an outcome would occur with the speech/communication requirement. Indeed, the SBOE has already heard testimony from some school boards confirming this dismal outcome.

NCA is celebrating its 100th year in 2014. We began as a small group of dedicated speech teachers who, in 1914, saw a need to champion and support academic speech education at all levels. And for one hundred years, we have eagerly worked to disseminate knowledge about communication, to cultivate the generation of knowledge about communication, and to support pedagogy about the discipline of communication. It is in that spirit that my colleagues and I strongly urge you to maintain and strengthen the speech/communication requirement as a statewide requirement for Texas high school students. This requirement is good for Texas students as they prepare for college and/or the workplace; it is good for Texas business as it seeks to find the best prepared employees; and it is good for Texas as an educational leader, paving the way for fruitful and productive pedagogy in an ever more complex world.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathleen J. Turner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathleen J. Turner, Ph.D.

Professor and Director of Communication Studies, Davidson College
President, National Communication Association